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A
PERSWASIVE
TO AN
Ingenious Tryal
OF
OPINIONS
IN
RELIGION.



L O N D O N :

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Chappell

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Ingenuous TRYAL
OF
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§ I.

THE great reason why they are few in comparifon who come to a right understanding and a well-grounded Perfwafion in matters of Religion, is becaufe they are not many who make a due inquiry into them. Were this done more generally, there would not be fo much ignorance and errour in the world, nor fo great a variety of Opinions and Sects, as there is, and for the moft part hath been in the world.

And there are three forts of men who fail of knowing the truth, for want of due endeavours to find it out. Some there are who want ability or opportunity to inquire; others, who wanting neither, do utterly neglect it, and will not apply their minds to it at all; a third fort make but a very imperfect fearch after truth. And

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fo all ignorance or mistake in things of moment, that concern the salvation of men, or the peace of the Church, may be attributed either to want of power and means to inquire after truth, or to unwillingness and perfect negligence, where it may be sought and attained to; or to laziness, inactivity, and partiality in seeking it.

To the first sort, we are not onely to reckon *Idlers*, who want a competent measure of Reason and Understanding wherewith to judge, but those also that having the same common natural gifts of the mind with others, are yet by reason of their outward circumstances, kept almost invincibly ignorant, having very little or no occasion given them to inquire into things, that they might know them better. And thousands who sit in *Bagan, or Mahumetan, or Popish schools, are thus situated in gross errors and remediless ignorance, as the case at present stands with them.* But blessed be God this is not our case, who live in such a time and place as put no man under circumstances of incurable ignorance.

As for the second sort of men, who have plentiful means and fair opportunities of being better informed, but utterly neglect to use them, they are either such who remain under the power of those false Principles which were instilled into them in their Education, or who blindly follow erring Guides, whose persons they have in admiration, resolving never to trouble themselves with a free and impartial use of their own reason concerning those Doctrines which they have in their own opinion wisely and safely taken upon trust. It happens likewise very often that men are led away by lofty conceits of their own judgment; and the extravagant opinion they have of themselves, will not suffer them to attempt such an ingenuous examination of things, as implies a possibility of their being deceived. But I believe they are more
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who take up Opinions and engage in Parties for worldly ends and carnal interests; and those, of all others, are the least from inquiring & conviction, because it is a great uneasiness to a mans mind, to find himself mistaken in those opinions which are for his profit or pleasure in this world. And mostly the power of custom strengthens all these causes of obstinacy in neglecting to inquire. Men are not willing to quit the Perswasions they have for a long time entertained, but had rather keep where they are, without troubling themselves to begin all a new, and to inquire whether they have not been all a long deceived. And where most of these obstructions meet together, as they often do, in the same person, if he be not succoured mightily by the grace of God, his mind is barred up for ever against the knowledge of the truth.

A third sort miss of the truth, not that they make no inquiry, but because they do this very imperfectly and superficially, and that either through sloth and laziness, being not willing to take that pains and care which is requisite for the discovery of truth; or through partiality: whence it comes to pass that they examine and weigh only or chiefly what is offered in favour of their own side, and make it the great end of their search not to follow what shall appear to be true upon inquiry, but to be confirmed in their present Perswasion. And because diligence and honesty are very necessary dispositions in order to the right understanding of a great many things in Religion, no wonder that they who inquire without these advantages, are rather hardened in Errorr than convinced of the Truth.

Now these being the common causes of ignorance and errorr amongst us at this day, and since they all center in want of due inquiry, I shall set my self to excite all sorts of people, who are not made incapable by

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natural weaknes of understanding, to prove and examine things which concern their own Souls and the peace of Christians, with that diligence and ingenuity which becomes reasonable creatures. And though I know 'tis a hard task that I am undertaking, by reason of the prejudices and corrupt interests of men which I must encounter; yet I am sure no advice can be more rational than this, that we would be perswaded to use our Reason, which, if we do not, we lay up the *common Talent* of our natures in a *Napkin*.

For God hath endued us with Faculties whereby we can discern between Truth and Errour; and moreover, with a natural desire to know the truth: so that the use of these Faculties is inexcusably neglected, and this desire is foully corrupted and debased, if we are easily imposed upon in things of great moment. God in our creation hath enabled and inclined us to seek the knowledge of Truth, and to inquire into the grounds of our Belief and Practice. And therefore to neglect this, is to abuse the first Gifts of God, and to sin against Nature.

And it should be every mans care to find out that truth which concerns Religion and another life, because this is every mans greatest interest; we should bestow most diligence there, where to be deceived is of most dangerous consequence.

But because there are some plausible Pretences against a due and impartial enquiry in matters of Religion, I shall prepare my way by endeavouring to remove those Prejudices that lie against it; and in order hereunto, I shall consider these three Questions.

1. Whether it be *dangerous* to private men to leave them to use their own judgment, and to be led by it in matters of Faith and Religion?
2. Whether a general liberty of examining and judging

ing in those things, doth mischief in the Church, and be the cause of Schisms and Heresies?

3. Whether if every one have a just Right to examine for himself, this be not a good reason for *Toleration*, or the universal liberty of practising according to a mans *Conscience* or Perswasion, after examination.

§ 2.

1. *Whether it be dangerous to private men to allow them the use of their own judgment in matters of Religion.*

Now to leave men wholly to themselves in this business, without directing them to use the best helps they can to find out the truth, is very dangerous indeed; and no wise man will contend for this liberty of judgment in behalf of Christian people, or of any sort of men whatsoever: for this were not so much to advise them to *judge* for themselves, as to *conclude* for themselves before they had taken any pains to judge. For I do not see how men can be said to judge, who refuse the means without which they can make no tryal. Now the assistance of men of greater knowledge and ability than themselves have, is one very necessary means by which private and unlearned persons are to examine and judge in matters of Religion. And God hath not onely given us ability to find out some truths by our selves, but also to weigh and consider what others offer to us: And therefore he hath appointed Governours and Guides of Souls, that are to *feed the Flock*, and to instruct Christian people in the way to Heaven. And one part of their work is to enable them to *give an answer to every one that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them*, 1 Pet. 3. 15. which I conceive they cannot do, without informing and helping them to judge for themselves. So that liberty of examining in order to private judgment, does by no means

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means exclude advising with and hearkning to men of greater skill and ability than our selves, especially to the publick Guides of Souls, but rather makes it necessary so to do, this being one means of Gods appointment by which we are to inform our selves. And I grant that without very good and clear reason, we are not to depart from their Doctrine, but in all doubtful cases to presume in favour of it.

But that it should be dangerous to private persons to weigh and consider, as well as they can, what their Guides teach them to believe or to do, this is that which I can by no means understand, unless it were a dangerous thing to follow our Guides like men that have Reason, and not like beasts that have none. It is at any time as safe to follow a Guide with our eyes open, as to suffer our selves to be blindfolded, and then to follow him by a string. God hath referred us to *Guides*, Heb. 13. 17. but yet he hath trusted us to our selves too, and we are to *try the spirits whether they be of God*: otherwise we may follow Guides that want Guides themselves. And if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch.

To say that inquiries after truth with the best endeavours and means that we have in our power, is the way to be mistaken, is to reproach our own Reason, and God the Author of it; since as it seems, the more we exercise and improve our Reason, the more likely we are to be in the wrong, and to deceive and abuse our selves.

At the great day of Accounts, Seducers shall answer for those whom they have deceived. And therefore the Guides of the Church are strongly obliged that they do not through wilfulness or negligencie mislead us. But if they mislead us in things that touch our eternal state, I do not find that all the blame will lie upon them, but rather that we also shall answer for it our selves: Otherwise why should our Saviour say, *Why of your selves do*
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do ye not judge that which is right? Luke 12. 57. and St. John, Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, &c. 1 Joh. 4. 1. and St. Paul, Prove all things, hold fast that which is good, 1 Theff. 5. 21. and, Let no man deceive you, 2 Theff. 2. 3. Again, if it be dangerous to permit men to judge for themselves in that sense wherein I contend for it, then these are not wholsom but very dangerous Exhortations.

And yet if a Church which pretends to be an *Infallible* Guide in Religion, could make it out clearly and plainly that she is so, I should, without much examination of her particular Doctrines, receive them as the Oracles of God. But then I must have stronger Arguments to assure me that she is infallible, than those which at present make me certain that she is actually deceived. For to submit to a pretended infallible Authority, without knowing why I do so, is to put it into the power of others, for ought I know, to lead me into the most damnable errors, and to call *Virtue* Vice, and *Vice* Virtue. Therefore they must be very convincing Reasons upon which I am to believe that of my Guide, which being once admitted, I must take his bare word afterward for all things else. I think none of the *Roman* Communion will deny this. And then it will follow, that for my own safety I am to use my own Reason and Judgment as severely as I can, before I admit this fundamental Article of their Faith. And this will amount to what I say, that it is so far from being dangerous for men to use their own Judgment in matters of Religion, that it is very dangerous for them not to do so; since otherwise they are likely to follow men of the greatest confidence, as they for the most part are who have the least reason for it.

Besides, if I am led into error by the Authority of a Church that does not pretend to Infallibility, I may hope

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to recover the knowledge of the truth, especially if it be a matter of great consequence, more than if she pretended and I believed her infallible. For such a Church will not so readily deny me the means of examining her Doctrine, and so I may be able to discover the error my self: If not, I have this comfort at least, that my Guides being not engaged to contend that they are infallible, are themselves in the way of detecting their own mistake, and will more easily come off from it. But they that pretend to Infallibility, are stak'd down to their Opinions; and though their Cause be never so bad, they are engaged to serve it. And therefore this Pretence is so far from discharging me of the pains of using my own Judgment and Reason in matters of Religion, that I make the most foolish venture in the world, if I do not use my Reason as strictly as I can in examining that very Pretence before I admit it. And though a Churches claim to Infallibility were in it self never so just and well-grounded, it is to me but a Pretence, till I understand the grounds of it.

Nor can any man blame me, if before I am convinced of the Infallibility of that Church, I take those particular Doctrines into consideration which are to be believed upon this account, that I may this way also judge of the reasonableness of that Pretence: for 'tis not for nothing that men would be thought infallible. If I find the Doctrine they would put off with such authority, to be indeed divine and heavenly, rational and scriptural, tending to the reformation and salvation of Mankind, this will incline me to yield more easily to the *antecedent* Arguments of the Infallibility of that Church. But if the Doctrine for which she vouches this Authority does, upon the most impartial tryal that I can make, appear to be worldly, unscriptural, or contrary to common sense; then I am bound to examine the grounds of her
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Pretence more severely than in the former case. And there is no question but such Doctrines may be taught by men pretending to Inspiration or Infallibility, which will justifie a man in rejecting that Pretence out of hand, and troubling himself no more about it. If a Physician of never so great name should tell me that he would infallibly cure my Disease, and then prescribe a dose of *Arsenick*, I think Reason would advise rather to question his Infallibility, because he goes thus madly to work, than to take his Poyson because he promises an Infallible Cure.

Now if I am not to do violence to my own understanding in things that concern my bodily health, much less should I do the same in things that regard my everlasting state. And they are a strange sort of men, who will allow people the liberty of using their Reason as well as they can for the security of their worldly interests, but will have them be led in the great affairs of Religion and Eternity, as if they had no reason at all. For to judge aright, and to know the truth in matters of Religion, which is our highest concernment, was the principal end for which we have Reason, and are Creatures of judgment and choice. And they may as well say that 'tis dangerous for a man to walk abroad with his eyes open, as that 'tis dangerous for him to take upon himself to judge as well as he can whether he be in the right way to Heaven or not.

§ 2.

If we consider what has been already said, it will not be difficult to answer the second Question.

2. *Whether a liberty of examining and judging in matters of Religion, doth mischief in the Church, and be the cause of Heresies and Schisms?* To which I answer, that

To affirm this, is in effect to say, that it had been

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much better, in order to the peace of the Church, and the prevailing of Truth, that men had been nearer to stocks and stones, than endued with natural Abilities of judging, and natural propensions to use those Abilities; which I think would be to reflect upon the Wisdom of our Maker. For certainly it had been better for men to have wanted the faculties of judging and proving, if it be so dangerous a thing to the Church to make use of them. Nor is it much for the credit of the Church, that it should be against her interest for men to examine her Doctrine, and use their Reason about it as well as they can.

To speak to the thing: It is not the liberty of examination and judgment in order to the knowledge of the Truth, that causeth Heresies and Schisms, but the not making a right use of this liberty, *i. e.* mens entring upon this work with Pride, and the prevalency of Lust and Passion, and worldly interest, their want of care and diligence, and of proving things sufficiently; their taking up Opinions without reasonable examination, and then seeking for Pretences to colour their obstinacy. The Lusts and Vices of men are against the peace of the Church and the interest of Truth, but not the use of that Reason which is the divine part of our Natures, and which God hath given us to restrain and govern our inferior Faculties.

'Tis true indeed, that if few or none troubled themselves at all to judge in matters of Religion, there would be no Heresies. But 'tis true too, that if they had no reason to judge of these things at all, there would have been no Heresies; and 'tis as true, that if there had been no Religion at all, it were impossible that there should be Heresies in Religion. But will any men say, that Reason or Religion is therefore the cause of Heresies? And yet there is as much reason to say this, as to conclude

clude that the use of our own understandings in the things of God, is the cause of Heresies. These things are too gross to need a Confutation.

And yet this Pretence against the liberty of proving what is propounded to us in Religion, is intended chiefly against private and ordinary persons, but not against the publick Guides and Officers of the Church ; whereas in truth, if there be any thing in it, it holds more strongly against these than against the other : And that because the most pernicious Heresies that ever came into the Church, were brought in by men of Learning and Authority in the Church. And if this Pretence be good, they of all men should be forbidden to inquire into matters of Religion ; because if they fall into any dangerous mistake, their Authority is likely to give reputation to it, and to make it go down more easily with the common People, than if it had been started by one of themselves. So that we must not lay the Heresies that have been in the Church, to the liberty we have been contending for, unless we will be content to exclude *all* from the duty of proving what they have been taught to believe. And no man can think this reasonable, unless he takes all Religions to be equally true, that is, every one to be alike false. And he that believes this, needs not care what Heresie he is of.

§ 3.

3. *But if every man hath a just liberty and right to examine for himself, is not this a good reason for Toleration, or for the universal liberty of practising according to a mans Conscience or Perswasion?* For to what purpose is liberty of enquiry, if after all, I must be concluded by the Authority of my Superiours, or else suffer under those Laws by which they provide for Uniformity in Religion?

To this I answer, That every mans right and duty
to

to judge for himself in matters of Religion, is no good reason for Toleration, unless it were also apparent that every man used that Right as he ought to do, *i.e.* with industry, deliberation, and impartiality. If all men were sincere, and would examine without prejudice, without that bias to one side which is made by lust and passion, and worldly interest, if they all intended to know the truth, that they might do their duty, then doubtless it were very fit that all should enjoy an undisturbed liberty of practice according to their Judgment; for then no man would err in things plain and necessary to his own salvation and the peace of Church and State. For our Lord hath assured us, that *if any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.* But so long as there is that Hypocrisie in the World whereof men are conscious to themselves, so long as all those Vices also reign, which insensibly corrupt the Judgment, and make men disloyal to the Truth, while they perceive it not; it is by no means reasonable that the State under which we live, should leave us lawless, and free from all obligation of temporal Penalties what *Religion* we profess, and what *Communion* we observe. For the most dangerous Pretence for the carrying on of seditious and rebellious designs against the Government, is that of Religion: And a few men that mean nothing but their own greatness and power, shall be able to manage the Zeal of a superstitious Multitude against the Government for their own private ends, while they scorn the superstition of their Followers, and perhaps all pretence to Religion in their own hearts. And therefore it concerns the Government to take care that the true Religion be protected by the Laws, and then to provide by the most prudent methods that no other be professed in the Commonwealth.

If it be said, that the end of all liberty to inquire and judge

judge for our selves is destroyed, if at last we must conform to the Laws, or be punished for our refusal : The contrary will be easily shewn to any one who believes that we are infinitely more concerned what will become of us in the life to come, than in our present fortunes. For suppose that they are Errours which Authority requires us to profess, and that they are unlawful things which it requires us to do in Divine Service, and that by a due and diligent examination of things I come to know this ; do I get nothing by my enquiry, but the severity of those humane Laws that are against me ? Do not I obtain the comforts of a good Conscience, in having honestly endeavoured to know the truth, and in doing what I thereupon knew to be my duty ? If I do hereby obtain Gods Favour at present, and shall obtain Gods Rewards in a better life, is not this worth all my care and sincerity, though I should get nothing by it in this World but Trouble and Persecution ?

So that it is worth the while to examine the Doctrine imposed upon me by Authority, though I know beforehand that be it right or wrong, I must be punished by man if I receive it not.

True Religion, and our observation to profess Gods Truth, and to do his Will, stands indeed upon the Authority of God, and the Evidence of divine Revelation ; but nevertheless, the profession thereof ought to be encouraged and protected by the Powers of the World, and by consequence all false Religions should be discountenanced, and the profession of them made uneasy by their Laws : Scripture and Reason teach us, that they no less than *Parents*, should use that Authority for God, which they have received *from him*. But if they, for want of sincere tryal and examination, do themselves establish Iniquity or *Hereſie* by a Law, and turn the edge of their Power against the true Religion, they must answer

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swer it to God at the day of Judgment, who hath *shewed* them as well as others, *what is good* and what he required of them.

In the mean while Persecution distinguishes between the *Sincere* and the *Hypocrite*; and as the *insincere* study how to perplex the *Truth*, and to avoid the convictions that are upon their minds, and to reconcile their Apostacy to their Credit and Consciences; so the *honest* inquire into the grounds of their Faith more diligently, and being desirous to strengthen themselves under Sufferings by a full assurance that they suffer for Righteousness sake, they search into all the grounds of their Perswasion more narrowly than if they had never come under this temptation: and by this means the true Doctrine comes to be propounded to the World, with the advantage of stronger Arguments, and those better managed than if it had never met with opposition.

But if the *true Faith and Worship* be establish'd by Law, and the Penalties of Nonconformity be strictly required; this is so far from hindring men from *enquiring*, that it lays an obligation upon a great many to consider things impartially, who otherwise would never have looked but upon one side of the Question; I mean all those whom either Wantonness and Self-conceit, or Faction and Worldly Interest, or the undue admiration of mens persons, and the like, would have held under a constant prejudice against Reason and Truth. A *carnal Argument* for a good Cause, is very often a wholsom means to remove a carnal prejudice against it: And the Authority of the Magistrate can hardly be better used *in matters of Religion*, than to make such a difference between the *Observers* of the *Ecclesiastical Laws*, and the *Dissenters* from them, that it shall be very hard for any man to lie under a Worldly Temptation, to dissent sufficient to recompence the damage he must undergo.

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This will make a great many impartial in weighing the Objections against Conformity, with the Arguments and Answers on the other side; and by degrees bring them to the knowledge of the Truth, and at length to a sincere love of it. It is a false Maxime, That *Force in matters of Religion makes Hypocrites, but not true Converts*. For sometimes it cures *Hypocrisie*, very often *Ignorance* and *Partiality*; and that is a good degree towards Conversion: And yet this will not justify the putting of men to death for mere difference in Religion. The least degree of severity which will do the business, is great enough. The Supreme Powers should consider their Subjects in these cases, as a wise and good Father would consider his own Children; who if he had power of life and death over them, would not kill his misbelieving Son, and yet would try to reduce him by Worldly Discipline, and drive him to consideration by the sensible effects of his Displeasure. The moderation of the *English* Laws for Uniformity, is visible to all disinterested persons; and though the unevenness of their execution hath rendered them less effectual, yet there are several who have cause to bless God for being compelled to come to our Churches, and to consider the Terms of our Communion with some impartiality; whereas if there had been an *absolute* Toleration, their Ignorance and Prejudices might have led them they know not whither.

The Church of *England* causeth the Scriptures to be publickly read, and puts them into the Peoples hands, and desires nothing more than that every one would diligently and impartially consider the cases between her and those that separate from her. And it is no absurd thing to say, that this liberty of Judgment which she allows, is consistent with the *English* Laws that require conformity of all; since if it had not been for those

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Laws, some men had never attained to liberty of Judgment, but had still been held in bondage to their Prejudices and Errours. And it is much to be feared, that they make the greatest noise for *liberty of Practice*, according to their Judgment, who have made little or no use of their Judgment in distinguishing between *good* and *bad*, *true* and *false*. They demand one liberty, while they make no use of another; the liberty of being *undisturbed* and *licentious* in a wrong way, while they never use that liberty of *examining the grounds of their Perswasion*, to which the Church so vehemently perswades them by her Ministers.

If it be urged, that when a man sets himself with honesty and diligence to examine the Case of Communion with the Church, and doth all that he can to inform himself aright in this matter, but cannot be satisfied that he may lawfully conform, and this through mere weakness of understanding; it is not reasonable that he should suffer any thing for that.

It may be said on the other side, that there are many more who fail of understanding their duty in this kind, for want of examination and inquiry, and through the prevalence of Prejudice and passion, than there are of those who continue erroneously perswaded through mere weakness of understanding. But as for those who in perfect weakness remain unconvinced, if I may suppose any such, I wish the Laws could distinguish them from the rest, and that they could be known by some visible characters, that they might be exempted from undergoing any penalties. But since this cannot be, it must be endured that a few or none in comparison, come to have hard measure, by means of that which is necessary for the common and publick good.

§ 4.

Having premised thus much concerning this subject, I shall proceed in this method following.

- I. To consider in what cases we are to enquire most of all into the Truth.
- II. To shew how or by what Rules or Tests we are to try and examine Opinions in Religion.
- III. How we ought to be disposed and qualified that our Inquiries may be profitable and successful.
- IV. To lay down some Motives whereby to persuade men to such Inquiry and examination.
- V. To consider what becomes us and is our duty, after the discovery and knowledge of the Truth.

I. I shall consider in *what cases we ought to be most careful in making inquiries after the Truth, lest we be imposed upon, or mistaken.*

All Inquiries about Religion are either concerning the truth of Religion in the general; or supposing the existence and providence of God, which is the true Religion, whether the *Pagan*, or the *Jewish*, or the *Mahometan*, or the *Christian*; or the truth of the Christian Religion being granted, what Communion of men professing Christianity, is to be chosen; for instance, whether the *Church of Rome*, or the *Church of England*, or the Communion of the Dissenters who separate from this Church.

But now all things are not alike needful to be proved, or are equally proper matters of inquiry. For,

I. Every man is not bound to know *all the false ways* of Religion that are in the World, and therefore not to try and examine every one of them. It is sufficient for most men, that they well consider the Faith and Profes-

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sion to which they have been educated, that if it be the Truth, they may be well-grounded in it ; if it be false, that they may upon good reason depart from it.

2. Things that are *self-evident*, need not to be examined : for no Argument can make them plainer to us than they are already. We may without any hesitation assent to such Principles as these: *That God cannot lie ; That men ought to observe fidelity and justice to one another*, and the like. If there were not some Principles that needed no proving, it were impossible to prove any thing ; and the more plain any thing is in it self, the less need there is to examine it. If I am told that *white* is *black*, I shall not go about to disprove it, because the thing is evidently false of it self, and I can use no Argument that can make the matter plainer than it was at first. In like manner, if any man pretends that there is no difference between Vice and Virtue but in name, and that all things are equally lawful ; this shall not put me to the trouble of examining the thing, because 'tis contrary to the common sense of mankind. And for this reason any man is to be excused that dismisses the Doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, without taking much pains about it ; because upon a very little consideration, there appears so many gross contradictions and inconsistencies in it, that I can have no greater reason to believe any thing is true, than I have to believe that is false.

3. Some things are hardly worth the examining, and it signifies little or nothing to understand the right side of the Question. If the Doctrine of the *immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary* were true, yet it were not worth a quarter of the pains they have taken about it in the Church of *Rome*. It is by no means true, that an infallible living Judge is necessary upon Earth, and that for the deciding of all Controversies in Religion ; since all such Controversies are not necessary to be decided,
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some of them being of so little concern to us, that it is no great matter if they remain Controversies to the Worlds end.

But we ought to use our Reason as well as we can to find out the truth in all those cases wherein it will be dangerous to be deceived; and therefore in these four:

First, When any man or company of men would gain us over to their way by lofty and extraordinary Pretences.

Secondly, When Doctrines are propounded to us with considerable Authority, which seem to encourage licentiousness, and to render all care of living well needless.

Thirdly, When we are tempted to separate from the Communion of the establish'd Church where we live, or if we are in a state of Separation from it.

Fourthly, When Opinions in Religion are propounded to us by those that would get us to yield up our Judgments wholly unto them, and do what they can to keep us from examining them.

A prudent man would examine in all these cases;

First, *When men make extraordinary Pretences.* The reasonableness of which I have already shewn, with reference to that Pretence of the Church of *Rome* to Infallibility. And the like is to be said of those that pretend to work *Miracles*, or that talk of *immediate Revelations*, of knowing the Truth by *Inspiration*, and of *more than ordinary Illuminations*. For it is not onely a childish thing to be frightened with big words from looking what is under them, but a very dangerous sort of cowardize, to be afraid of calling those things into question which are set off with such highflown Pretences. For from hence it has come to pass, that *Superstition* and *Idolatry*,
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Enthusiasms and *Impostures*, have prevailed so much in the World. It is somewhat strange that we should believe men the more, for that very reason upon which we should believe them less, that is, for magnifying themselves. And yet if this had not been common, *Mahomet* had not imposed upon so great a part of the *World*, nor the Church of *Rome* upon so great a part of *Christendom*, nor our *Enthusiasts* upon so many People in *England* as they have. I would not be backward to give that man a hearing, that pretends to great things in teaching Religion; but then I should be something forward to give him a tryal too: for otherwise I might encourage a very impudent Hypocrite to be more impudent still, and to play upon my easiness till I had swallowed all the foolish and damnable Opinions which he would have me believe for his own advantage.

Secondly, *When we meet with Doctrines that seem to strike at the foundations of Morality and good living, we are to examine them too, before we yield our assent, though they be recommended by men of name and authority.* For the end of divine truth is a good and holy life; and therefore I should suspect that to be false Doctrine, which in my judgment either takes away the necessity of Piety and Virtue, or discourages men from endeavouring to attain them. For instance, I find this Doctrine maintained by some men of great note, That God hath from all eternity absolutely chosen some men to salvation, and reprobated the rest, without respect to any personal qualifications. Now if this be true, I cannot see for my life how the obtaining of eternal happiness, and the avoiding of damnation, depends upon any care of mine, or upon any thing that I can do, since every mans state is absolutely over-ruled by predestination and an irreversible decree; so that let me do what I please, all that I can do for another world will be but lost labour, and might

might as well be spared. But if I am sensible of this, it is but reasonable that I should not rely upon the credit of the Author or of the Preacher for so perilous a Doctrine; but because it is pretended to be grounded upon the ninth Chapter to the *Romans*, I should go to the Apostle my self, and carefully inquire into his meaning in that place, by the best Rules of interpretation that I can learn. And whoever goes thus impartially to work, will find that the Apostle in that place was discoursing of another Question, and indeed upon a subject that has nothing to do with this Question of absolute Election or Reprobation of the persons of men; and that though the words sound that way to a man that is already prepossess'd, yet the meaning of them is nothing to the purpose. Suspicion of Doctrines when it is grounded upon so good a reason as we are now speaking of, should cause inquiry, and then that inquiry will discover on which side the truth lies. He that would be a *Libertine*, and live as he lists, may be pleas'd when he meets with any pretended Doctrine of Religion that will excuse a wicked life, or discourage Virtue and holiness; and therefore it is likely that he will rest satisfied, and examine no farther. But an honest mind will not let a man deceive himself in this manner; but if it does not cause him to reject such Opinions as soon as ever he has well satisfied himself of their consequences, it will at least keep him from admitting them, till he has tried them every way that he can.

Thirdly, *We ought also to be very well satisfied, and that upon much consideration of the matter, before we separate from the Communion of the Church where we live.* For whatever some men may think of it, this is a business of so weighty a nature and consequence, that it is not to be resolved upon or continued in, till we are sure we are in the right, and that upon most plain and evident reasons.

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And if there be any case in which a Christian ought not to go rashly to work, this is one. And therefore it is greatly to be lamented, that so many amongst us pretending to the power of Godliness, should make so light a matter as they plainly do of running into separate Congregations; it being very notorious, when one discourages the point with them, that they never enquired why the Church-Assemblies were to be forsaken, and what it is in the establish'd Forms of Worship, or in the Terms of our Communion, that makes it needful for an honest and wise Christian to depart from it. And this is an Argument that they take it to be a matter of very little consequence; for otherwise they would have applied themselves with more diligence to weigh it in all the particulars that belong to it.

And therefore I shall offer some Reasons in behalf of such inconsiderate People, to convince them how bold and dangerous a thing it is to separate from this Church of *England*, unless they were fully satisfied upon mature examination that there are just and necessary causes for separation, such namely as will make them sinners against God, if they do not separate.

1. *If without just cause I separate from this Church, I do wilfully reject the great blessings and advantages of Communion with it, and must be answerable to God for slighting that merciful providence of his through which I happened to be born and bred in a place where I might enjoy the benefits of Church-Communion, without venturing at any disorderly and sinful practice for them.* Surely it is no small blessing, if my lot has been cast where so great a blessing did, as it were, lie in wait for me, where the true Christian Doctrine and way of Worship was recommended to me by publick Authority, and establish'd by Law and Custom, and defended to my hand by clear and strong Arguments. If this be our Case in the Church
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of *England*, then my separation from her (I say it again) makes me guilty of a stupid and ungrateful contempt of Gods exceeding mercies in disposing my condition in this World so to my advantage, that I was *born*, *baptized*, and *bred* in a place where the Truth invited me, and was ready to receive me, before I made one step towards a search after her. Indeed to be baptized within the Communion of a particular Church, and to have been born and to live under that Authority which requires me to keep close to it, is of it self no sufficient reason why we should continue to be of it; but it is a mighty reason why we should examine things carefully before we leave it, or take up a resolution never to return to it, if we have left it already; because if there be no just reason for separation, we shall have the more to answer to God: For it is a great fault to neglect searching after the *Truth* in matters of this concern, even when it lies a *great way off* from a man; but it is much more inexcusable to reject it when it lies *at our doors*.

2. *I had need be very careful and impartial in this case, since if the reasons upon which I separate be not really weighty and substantial, I am at once guilty of throwing off that subordination and subjection to the Pastors and Guides of the Church, which the Christian Profession requires, and of contemning the lawful commands of my Superiours in the State, contrary to the Rule of the Gospel which obliges me to submit to their Ordinances.* I should not easily be led to a Practice where there is danger of such a complicated sin.

3. I am to consider, that *differences in Religion and Worship, do dangerously affect the Peace of Kingdoms and all other Societies, especially where the interests of Church and State are so mixed and interwoven together as they are in England.* They that agree in Religion, are the most likely to be at peace, and to agree together in other

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things. But it seldom happens that they maintain hearty correspondence in any thing, who are of opposite Communions in the service of God. When the Unity of the Church is broken, there is a foundation laid of those uncharitable censures and animosities which for the most part end in violence and bloudshed, very often to the dissolution of Kingdoms and Nations. It were easie to put this out of question by several instances of the sad experience which Christendom hath had of it. But the late and sad Example hereof at home, is enough to make all others needless for our conviction. The Rebellion here was supported by nothing more than by difference about Religion. This was the principal cause that brought together so many People against the King, and that inflamed them with anger and resolution to venture all, till they had secured the King and enslaved the Kingdom. I need not say (for sure every body must be sensible of that) how diversity of Religions weaken the Government, and render a People unable to do well for themselves, to oppose foreign Enemies, and to use the most likely opportunities for the common safety and prosperity. Therefore in love to our Country, and for the sake of Peace at home, and of success in all just Enterprizes abroad, we should be very backward to violate the present Constitution of the Church, and to unsettle the state of Religion, and never separate from the establish'd Communion, till we find our selves forced to it by Reasons so plain and weighty, that there is no avoiding of it, if we would keep our selves honest men and good Christians.

4. *The setting of a bad example to others should in this case be most considered.* For if where a necessary Reformation in things of Religion is made by just Authority, or a lawful separation made by private persons from a Communion polluted with unlawful conditions; it is yet very

very hard to keep the Example from being abused by others in reforming or separating without any such cause, and will still be of worse consequence to set an example of wanton and unjustifiable separation : for this is so plain a contempt of Authority, Order, and Unity, that others will be afraid to subdivide into more Parties, as Self-conceit, Ambition, or Revenge, or the like evil dispositions shall prompt them.

5. *If separation should not be made but with very great caution, for fear of incurring the guilt of Schism by a causeless and unlawful departure from the Assemblies of the Church, and setting up other Assemblies in opposition to them.* This in the judgment of the ancient Christians was no less than for a man to cut himself off from the *Catholick Church of Christ*; and if the body of *Christ* be but one, as the Scripture plainly tells us, he that divides himself from any particular Church that is a Member of this Body, divides himself from the whole Body. And therefore *Schismatics* were not accounted by the *Ancients* to be *within the Church*, although they retained the profession of the *Common Faith*. And surely a man would well advise with himself about an action whereby he may be in danger of putting himself into that condition. The *Unity of Christians in one Body and Communion*, was instituted by our Lord for very great and weighty reasons, and particularly for the securing of *Brotherly kindness* amongst his Disciples, who being Members of the *Body of Christ*, should therefore love and care for one another more than other men are wont to do; and for the retaining of Professors within the Rules of a true *Christian* life, from which if they should break away by any scandalous practice, they were to be punished for it by the shame of being turned out of the Communion of the Church, and by the loss of the great advantages thereof. But it is evident, that they who

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are guilty of dividing the Communion of *Christians*, and setting up one Communion in opposition to another, without necessary cause, do what in them lies to render this provision for the *maintenance of Charity and purity of Manners* amongst Believers, altogether ineffectual. And we see by experience that hatred and ill will, and looseness of life, gains ground more by the *Schisms* that are amongst Christians, than by any thing else; and no wonder, since men that are of different and opposite Communions do not use to love one another; and vicious persons do not value the Communion of a true Church, nor care if for their ill manners they be turned out of it, when they can take Sanctuary in a pretended Church of another Communion, that makes as loud a claim to all the Priviledges of a Church-Society as that Church can do from which they have divided themselves. Which things being considered, we are not to wonder that in *St. Cyprian's* time *Schism* was accounted no less, but rather a greater fault than to sacrifice to *Idols* for the avoiding of persecution. For though *Idolatry* simply considered be in it self worse, yet *Schism* in its consequences is more pernicious. He that is the Head of a *Schism*, does more mischief to the Church than if he turned a *Pagan* or a *Mahometan*. The conclusion from hence is this: That it concerns every man that separates himself from an established Church, it concerns him, I say, as much as his Soul is worth, to look to it that the cause of his separation be just and necessary, and such as will throw the guilt of *Schism* upon that Church from which he separates.

But alas, how few are they that examine the reasons upon which they have broken away from the Church of *England*? How many, that when they are pressed in good earnest, can say no more for themselves than that they have better preaching, and more spiritual praying else-

elsewhere, than in our Parish-Churches? How will they abuse our Prayers and call them *Porridge*, and such other vile names, who never in all their lives so much as read them, and are not ashamed to own that they have not? They call the Bishops *Antichristian*, and the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church *Idolatrous* or *Superstitious*, who yet never well considered what *Antichrist* means, what is *Idolatry* or *Superstition*; who have little or nothing to say, if they be asked what evil is in *Bishops*, in *Liturgies*, and in the *Rites* of our Worship. How many others are there who read the Books written to defend the separation, but will not vouchsafe so much as to look upon any one that is published in behalf of the Communion of our Church? God of his mercy give a better Spirit to such people, and Repentance to those that have misled them.

Fourthly, We should not easily believe those men in matters of Religion, who would keep us from examining their Doctrines by fair ways of trial, and would affright us into an implicit Faith, by pronouncing damnation against all that are not of their own way. If men use violence or subtilty to hinder us from judging for our selves, there is great reason to suspect that they are conscious to themselves of a bad Cause which will not bear the trial. I need not say how this reaches the Roman Church, which forbids the Laity to read the Scriptures, unless some one Lay-man has that special favour granted him of leave so to do from his Ordinary, who commonly is wise enough not to give this license, but where he is sure the party is fast enough to the Cause of that Church.

Those of the separate Congregations best know what Arts are used to keep the people that go that way, from informing themselves by reading our Books, or discouraging with our Ministers about the matters in controversy

troverſie between them and us. But we are not ignorant of all of them, ſome of their Leaders teach them to pity our ignorance, and want of illumination; Alas, poor wretches that we are, *we know not the things of the Spirit of God!* we are ſtrangers to the life and power of *Godlineſſ*!

Thus they uſe to repreſent us. They take all the good names and promiſes of the Scripture to themſelves, and leave the threatnings of God, and the puniſhments inflicted upon his enemies, to us. Now this is but a cunning and indirec[t way to keep the People from hearkning to any thing we can ſay to 'em, and to teach them how to conclude againſt us, without thinking it to any purpoſe to examine what is offered on both ſides. They that have a good Cauſe, need not uſe thoſe diſingenuous Arts; they will not fright men from conſidering what their adverſaries ſay, by denouncing damnation againſt them, nor forbid them to read their Books, but rather encourage them to do ſo, that they may ſee the difference between Truth and Errour, between *Reason* and *Sophiſtry*, with their own eyes. This is the effect of a well-grounded confidence in the Truth; and there is this ſigne of a good Cauſe apparently diſcernable in the Application of the Clergy of this Church both to their friends and enemies. They deſire both the one and the other to conſider impartially what is ſaid for us and againſt us. And whatever Guides of a Party do otherwiſe, they give juſt cauſe to thoſe that follow them, to examine their Doctrines ſo much the more, by how much they are unwilling to have them examined. It is a bad ſigne when men are loath to have their Opinions ſeen in the day, but *love darkneſſ rather than light*.

Thus I have ſhewn in what caſes we are moſt concerned to examine the Doctrines of thoſe that undertake to inſtruct and guide us.

§ 5.

II. Because the duty of *proving all things* supposes certain *Rules* and *Tests*, by which Doctrines are to be examined and tryed, I proceed to shew what they are. Now it is very certain that the Rules by which we are to try Doctrines for our own satisfaction about them, are no other than those want of Argument by which a wise man would prove the truth of his Perswasion to others for their satisfaction. And therefore it is plain that those Rules must be common to me and to other men whom I would also guide so into the knowledge of that Truth to which I have attained. And they are these three.

1. *Reason*, which is a common Rule to all men.
2. *Scripture*, which is a common Rule to all Christians.
3. *Antiquity*; or the uniform Judgment and Practice of the Church in the first Ages of Christianity; which is a common Rule to those who are versed in the Histories of the Primitive Church, and in the Writings of the Fathers.

The two former Rules are the principal and most necessary, and we are safe if our Perswasions in Religion will bear the Test of *Reason* and *Scripture*, and withal those Rules are near at hand for every mans use amongst us. But the last Rule is also of good use to those that can use it, for their own confirmation in the truth, and stopping the mouths of gain-sayers. But more particularly,

1. By Reason, I do not understand that *Faculty* by which we are men, and can compare one thing with another, and argue and conclude, &c. for this is that Natural Power by which we use any kind of Rule whereby to judge of the truth or falshood of Opinions in Religion; but I understand by it, those *common Truths* which

which are natural to the minds of men, and to which we give a ready assent, without any need of having them proved by any thing else. For by these fundamental Truths we are to prove all things else; and if there were none such, we could prove nothing. And they are such as these, *That nothing can make it self; That the same thing cannot be and not be at the same time; That common sence is to be trusted; That God is a being absolutely perfect; That the Good is to be chosen, and the Evil to be refused; and that Contradictions cannot be true, and the like.* Now whatever is by true consequence deduced from such Principles, is thereby proved to be *true*; and whatsoever is repugnant to them, or can be disproved by them, is *false*. They are the fore-mentioned Propositions, with others as self-evident as they; which make up that which we call the *Light* of Nature or of Reason. And I mention this Rule in the first place, because it must be presupposed to all other ways and means of enquiring after Truth, and without which nothing could be done in it; insomuch that the belief of that Truth which is not to be deduced from mere natural Reason, but depends upon a divine Testimony, is at last resolved into a rational Act, and relies upon this natural Principle, that *God cannot lye.*

Wherefore they that cry down *Reason*, as if it were at no hand to be trusted in matters of Religion, and call it *carnal, blind, and foolish Reason*, and such-like vile names, if they are in good earnest, they are incapable of searching after Truth themselves, and of receiving any satisfaction from others. While they are in this humour, I may as well take a Beast to dispute with, as go about to convince them. And if all men were thus senseless, it were impossible that men should be serviceable to instruct one another in the *things of God*. But to abandon the use of Reason in matters of Religion, and to scorn a
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man when he speaks consistently, and argues clearly from common Principles of Truth, is such a wretched sort of unmanliness, that I cannot but think it is for the most part taken up in designe, by those men that have brought Nonsense, and Contradictions, and absurd Opinions into Religion; which no man can admit, without doing violence to his own understanding. For when Hypocrites have for their worldly interest debauched Religion in this manner, they know that the meanest people will never swallow their gross absurdities, unless they can first prevail with them to believe that 'tis a dangerous thing to trust their own eyes, or to hearken to any discourse from Principles of Reason, though it be never so clear and strong; and that it is a kind of merit to believe things incredible, and to stick to a conclusion the faster, the more impossible it seems to be true. But by the way, if Reason be one, and that the first means by which we are to judge for our selves in matters of Religion, as I shall make bold to say it is, I should vehemently suspect, without farther examination, that they know their Opinions to be very foolish, who at first dash renounce the most general and necessary Rule by which they are to be tried.

I shall onely adde, that because the fundamental Principles of Reason are the same all the World over; Reason is therefore the most publick Rule and Test, whereby to judge between Truth and Errour. And therefore if a Council defines things in that manner, that I must forsake right Reason to follow its Definitions; when I make this plain, this is not opposing a *private Spirit* to a *publick Judgment*, but appealing from a less publick Judgment, to the most publick Sense and Judgment of mankind.

§ 6.

2. As *Reason* is a Rule to all men, so is *Scripture* a Rule to all *Christians*, at least it ought to be so; and all pretend to make it a Rule for their Judgment, by appealing to it. The Church of *Rome* indeed allows it to be but *part* of the Rule of Faith; we say it is an *intire* and perfect Rule thereof. However, so long as she acknowledges the Scriptures to be a Rule, though she pretends there is another Rule besides that, she is to be concluded by the authority of the Scriptures; and so we are to be acquitted by her, in not believing her *against the Scriptures*.

Now every body must grant that we do not judge rightly by the Scriptures, where we mistake the meaning of the Text. And we ought to be sure that the sense wherein we take any place, is the true sense, before we make our interpretation of it a Rule whereby to examine other things.

Where the sense is very plain, it requires nothing more than common sense and common honesty to understand it; and it is very reasonable to suppose that God hath revealed all points necessary to salvation so clearly and plainly, that it is not difficult for an honest man to understand what they are.

But because there are many obscure places in the Scriptures, we must be very careful not to ground any Doctrine upon them, till we have well weighed and examined the meaning of those places; and the way to be secure from any dangerous mistake in concluding from places of Scripture that are more or less hard to be understood, is to observe such cautions as these are, which I think all Christians must allow to be reasonable.

1. That we take no Text in a sense which is repugnant

nant to common Sense and natural Reason.

2. That we put no sence upon a place of Scripture that is repugnant to the general scope and designe of the whole Word of God.
3. That we understand no difficult places in a sence that is contrary to those places whose meaning is plain and manifest to all men.
4. That we mistake not those places for plain, which are not so.
5. That we put no other sence upon a Text than what agrees with the scope and designe of that particular Discourse wherein we find it.

1. *Before we conclude upon the sence of a Text, so as to prove any thing by it, we must be sure that sence is not repugnant to natural Reason.* For if it be, it cannot be the true meaning of the Scripture. For God is the Original of natural Truth, as well as of that which comes by particular Revelation; and, as *Hierocles* saith, *to believe and obey right Reason, and to follow God, are the same thing.* And therefore no Proposition that is repugnant to the fundamental Principles of Reason, can be the sence of any part of Gods Book; and that which is false and contrary to Reason, can no more be true and agreeable to the revelations of Scripture, than God, who is the Author of one as well as the other, can contradict himself. From hence it is evident, that these words, *This is my body*, are not to be understood in that sence which makes for the Doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, because it is impossible that contradictions should be true; and we cannot be more certain that any thing is true, than we are that that Doctrine is false. There are some other Doctrines maintained by men of Name in the World, that they have no better grounds for, than obscure Texts interpreted contrary to the Principles of natural Reason

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and Religion. This caution therefore is to be minded in the first place.

2. *We must put no sence upon a difficult place, which contradicts the great end and drift of the whole Bible.* Now that is, to work Faith in men, and thereby to bring them to repentance, and to a holy life. And therefore whatsoever Doctrine does naturally tend to take men off from the care of holy living, by nourishing them in foolish presumption, or driving them to miserable despair, cannot be the Doctrine of the Scriptures; and therefore such a Doctrine cannot be proved from any obscure Text of the Bible, and by consequence that sence of an obscure Text from which it may be proved, is not the true sence, unless we can believe that some part of the holy Books teaches something that undermines the great end of the whole. There are too many Opinions amongst some Christians that have no other colour for them, than Scripture interpreted without this necessary caution, which must therefore be added to the former.

3. *We must not understand a difficult place in a sence that is contrary to those places whose meaning is plain and manifest to all men.* For the Scripture cannot teach one thing plainly in one place, and the quite contrary obscurely in another. It is but reasonable therefore in trying to understand a difficult place, or in going about to prove any thing from it, that we should compare Scripture with Scripture, and the obscure places with those that are plain; not to interpret the plain by the obscure, which is contrary to all Rules of Discourse, but the obscure by the plain; especially because the plain places contain things that are most necessary to be understood and believed by us: and therefore we cannot without great danger forsake the Doctrine which they teach; as every man in effect does, who takes a difficult place

place in a sence contrary to that Doctrine. In a word, the Scripture is our Rule principally where it is easiest to be understood, and the meaning is most plain and evident. But this caution will be of greater use, if we take the next along with us; and that is this:

4. *In trying Opinions by Scripture, we must be something careful lest we mistake those places for plain, which indeed are not so, but more or less obscure.*

And here I think it needful to shew what I mean by the plainness or by the difficulty of a Text. A Text is then plain, when that is the true and intended meaning of it which the first reading or hearing of the words doth suggest to a mans mind. And the Scripture is thus plain in necessary points, especially in the Precepts and Exhortations thereof, which though in some places they are couched under more obscure terms, yet in others they are delivered with this plainness.

A Text may be said to be difficult, when we do not hit of the true and intended sence upon the first reading, or gather it from the bare surface of the words, but must search and enquire farther to know it.

And there are two sorts of difficult Texts in Scripture. Some places are so hard to be understood, that upon the first reading of the words or phrases, no tolerable or intelligible sence can be put on them at all, without a great deal of farther study and enquiry; the difficult places of which sort are more seldom perverted to maintain any ill Opinion: for no body goes about to make a Text a Scriptural proof of any thing, without he first determines with himself in what sence to take it; and as for the hard places of this kind, it being not obvious at the first reading what sence they can bear, a man cannot well offer to prove any thing by them. The other sort of difficult Texts are those which being taken by themselves, do upon the first sight or
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sound of the words, seem to have a plain sence and meaning, which yet are not to be understood in that sence the words will be upon the first reading of them; and these are the hard places in Gods Word which are most perverted, and taken in such sence as the Holy Ghost never intended: for then is an hard place like to be wrested, when it seems plain to him who doth not understand it; and a difficult Text may seem plain to him who for want of studying and considering, thinks he understands it, but doth not.

I shall instance in some difficult Texts of the latter sort, which have been mistaken for plain (that is) erroneously taken to have such a meaning as they appear to have upon the first reading.

In the ninth Chapter of the Epistle to the *Romans* we have these words, *That it might not be of works, but of him that calleth*: some take this for a plain place, and therefore think it a clear scriptural truth, that our *salvation* is not at all of our works, but onely proceeds from an absolute decree of Heaven.

So again we have it affirmed by the Apostle in the same Chapter, *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*. Hence some think it is plain in Scripture, that what we do signifies little, all is from an arbitrary favour of God.

Again, in the *1 Cor.* 4. 7. we find these words, *Who maketh thee to differ from another?* From the sound of which words some gather that we are not free Agents in our own conversion; but that if we be better than our Neighbours, it is an Almighty Power hath made us so, and not any free choice or care of our own.

Now certain it is, that we mistake the meaning of a Text of Scripture, if we look upon it as plain when it is not so; and consequently, in this case we cannot be able to judge what is orthodox or erroneous, by having recourse to any Scriptures so misapprehended. But

But how can I know when a place is but seemingly plain, and not really so, (*i. e.*) when I am not to take that to be the meaning of the place, which I may apprehend upon the first running of the words and sound of the phrases?

This is to be known by comparing places together, and going by this Rule. A place seems onely to be plain, but is not, when it's uppermost sence, and what it offers to us, does not agree with the sence of a place undoubtedly plain. For instance, the Texts now mentioned may seem plain to those who would prove their erroneous Perswasions to be scriptural Truths by them; yet if we suppose them plain, (*i. e.*) if we think they are to be taken in that sence which they will bear at the first reading, then they are Texts undeniably repugnant to such places of *St. Paul*, as all must believe and acknowledge to be plain.

For whereas he says—*That it might not be of works*, &c. in another place he gives us this plain Precept, *Work out your salvation*. Is not salvation of works, and yet must we work it out? Either therefore it is not true in the sence some take the words, that salvation is not of works, or it is not proper to bid us work it out; wherefore by this plain place [*Work out your salvation*] we must conclude that the other place [*That it might not be of works*] whatsoever the sence of it may be, it cannot have this meaning, that our salvation doth not depend upon our works or doings. Phil. 2. 12.

In like manner, whereas the Apostle says [*It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, &c.*] doth he not in a plain practical discourse, wherein he compares the Christian life to a Race, exhort us *so to run that we may obtain*? 1 Cor. 12. 24.

Now is it not of running that we obtain? and yet doth he bid us *so run that we may obtain*? Wherefore the plain

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plain Precept *to run*, &c. evidently shews that it cannot be the meaning of the other place, that it is not by *running*, or by diligence in a Christian life, that we obtain salvation.

1 Cor 4.7. Again, whereas he asketh in one place, *Who maketh thee to differ from another?* he also exhorteth in another, *Be not conformed to the world.* And therefore the

Rom. 12.2. meaning of the former clause cannot be, that the *righteous* man who is *more excellent than his neighbour*, doth nothing towards the making of that difference: for then it would be very improper to exhort a man to make that difference, by not *conforming to the world.*

Finally, it is evident that these places of St. Paul which I have now compared, cannot be *all* of them plain, for then they are irreconcilably repugnant to one another; and if they are not all plain, then some of them must not be thought to have such a meaning, as the first reading of the words might make us think they have. And therefore in judging things by Scripture, we must be careful that we do not prove or disprove them by Scriptures mistaken for plain when they are not so.

5. *We must also see that the sense wherein we take a passage of Scripture that belongeth to a Discourse, be agreeable to the designe and scope of that Discourse to which it belongeth.* This Rule, as it is necessary for all to observe, so it is especially to be urged upon men that are apt to interpret places that are not of themselves plain, by those Opinions that they are already possessed with a belief of, but for which they have little ground, besides the mere sound of some Texts, which at first hearing seem to be of their side; but which, if they were compared with the designe of the holy Writer in that Chapter or Book, would be found to mean quite another thing. All that I shall say besides of this Rule is, that the difficulty of many places that are not of themselves plain, will be removed by observing it. For instance,
by

by this way we shall easily be satisfied, that that fore-mentioned place of *St. Paul, Who maketh thee to differ from another?* was chiefly meant of those extraordinary gifts which were distributed amongst believers in the first Ages of the Church; and therefore (though in a qualified sense this is true of all saving Graces) it is very consistent with all those Scriptures that suppose the difference between the righteous and the wicked, to depend upon something which is in the power of the righteous. If we mangle coherent Discourses, and take a shred or a phrase of Scripture by it-self, without regard to the main scope of the place, and this to prove what what we would have; we do not try our Opinions by Scripture, but we interpret Scripture by our own Opinions.

Thus I have shewn what Cautions are to be observed in Judging by Scripture. I doubt not but all will acknowledge them to be very reasonable and equal; and if all men had observed them, who have a just veneration for the Scriptures, the Word of God had been better understood and less wrested; unsound Divinity had not easily passed for Scriptural Truth, and all occasion of those unjust Reproaches had been taken away which the Church of *Rome* throws upon us for allowing to all Christians the free use of Gods Holy Book.

And thus much for the Rules of Reason and Scripture.

The third I mentioned was *Antiquity and Catholick Tradition*. Now if this Rule, as I said at first, be of excellent use, then they are in the best way to find out what is the true Christian Religion by it, who stick to the Holy Scriptures, though they are not capable of using it otherwise. For if that be true which was most anciently taught and believed in the Church, and which was received all along in the best Ages of the Church;

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then he that can prove his Faith by Scripture, has the Argument of *Antiquity* and *Catholick Tradition* unquestionably on his side, because the *Scriptures* are the most ancient Records of our Religion, and they have been delivered down to us as such from the beginning through all Ages to our present times. But we acknowledge also the testimony of Antiquity of something of a later date, that is, of the antient Fathers of the Church, to be of very good use for the clearing of some places in Scripture; for shewing what *Order* and *Discipline* was left in the Church by the Apostles; for confirming us in points of Faith grounded upon the Scriptures, but which have been disputed and opposed by *Hereticks*; and likewise for confuting those gross errors in Belief or Practice, which of later days have been brought in amongst Christians, especially those of the Church of *Rome*. But how things are to be examined by this Rule, I shall not here direct, because this is the subject of an excellent Discourse already published.

Discourse about Tradition, shewing, &c.

And thus much concerning Rules whereby to try Opinions in Religion.

§ 7.

III. The *Dispositions* wherewith we are to search for the Truth by these means, are also of necessary consideration: for whatever other advantages we have, if we be greatly defective in these, we shall very often lose our labour, and fall into mistakes of dangerous consequence.

To qualifie a man for receiving Truth when propounded with sufficient evidence, or to find it out by his own search, there must be these three things.

1. A prepared mind.
2. Competent Diligence.
3. Prayer to God for his blessing upon that Diligence.

1. *A prepared mind*, which our Saviour calls a *good and honest heart*. Now this consists in *Humility, Ingenuity, and Sincerity*.

Humility is necessary, because *overweening* and *self-conceit* makes a man apt to despise what those of a different Persuasion can say for themselves, before their Arguments are considered; and in general, to neglect that help which may be had by the advice and reasoning of others. So likewise *vain-glory* fixeth a man in an error he hath once defended; and while he is unwilling to acknowledge a mistake, he strains all his Wit to delude himself into a stronger belief of it, and of his ability to defend it. In Controversies he is desirous of *victory*, and would fain be thought *some-body*; and therefore he studies more to expose an adversary, than to inform himself. And if he be yet to chuse his side of a Question, he takes the wrong one, if it be more fashionable than the right. Therefore says our Saviour, *Whoever doth not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child*, i. e. with a meek and pliable spirit, *shall not enter therein*. Again, says he, *My sheep hear my voice*; intimating that they would be easily convinced who were of tractable and humble minds. And therefore he adds concerning the *Pharisees*, that they rejected him, because they *were not of his Sheep*, i. e. because of their haughty and inflexible dispositions.

Prejudice is apt to bar the mind against conviction as well as *Pride*, and therefore to *Humility* we must adde *Ingenuity* and *Sincerity*, by which a man is qualified to distinguish between the suggestions of Prejudice on the one side, and the force of good Reasons on the other.

Ingenuity is opposed to those Prejudices that are either unavoidably contracted, or taken up through weakness of understanding.

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Of the former sort are the Prejudices of *Education*, or conversing altogether with our own Party. Men are generally prepossess'd with great favour to those Opinions in which they have been all along trained up, and which have been instilled into them by all that they have conversed with. And therefore we cannot be meet Inquirers after Truth, if we want the ingenuity of suspecting our selves on this side, and trying those Perswasions in which we have been bred up, with the greater impartiality and severity.

Some men are prejudiced by an unaccountable inclination toward an Opinion; or an antipathy against it; and these ought the more carefully to distinguish between the warmth of their imaginations on the one side, and the force of Arguments on the other; and not to take a passionate fondness for a conclusion, or an aversion from it, to be a Reason one way or other. It is very incident to weak minds, to prejudg in favour of their Opinions whose persons they admire, and mostly to that degree, as not to hear with any patience an Argument against them. Such a *Presumption* man said this or that, and therefore no body must say otherwise. But it is at once disingenuous and folly, to entertain such an opinion of any man, as to take all that he says for Gospel; for the best men are fallible, and 'tis easie for an Hypocrite to make himself pass for a Saint in the opinion of ordinary people; and therefore men may be led into great errors, whose judgments are captivated in this manner.

To this we may adde that Prejudice which arises from conceiving hard things of mens persons; which an ingenious man will by no means yield to, but will consider what another says, though he does not fancy the man. It is reason enough with some people to reject all that their Minister says to convince them of their mistakes,

if he be called a *High Church-man*, or goes for an *Arminian*; and all this while they stand in their own light, and will not suffer themselves to be instructed in many profitable Truths which they might learn. Thus the Jews, though they were astonished at our Saviour's Doctrine and Works, yet believed not; and this because they were offended at him for the meanness of his Parentage.

Some are so weak as to be prejudiced against Opinions and Practices, meerly because they have heard them often abused, nicknamed, and inveighed against in a rude and reproachful manner. And this goes a great way with some Dissenters to make them deaf to all our Reasons, that when they are got together; they hear the Rites and Prayers of our Church scoffed at and called by vile names. But it stands not with the least ingenuity, to run away with prejudice against things that are abused and laugh'd at, without examining whether there be reason for it.

Sincerity is opposed to these Prejudices that arise from *vicious affections* and *worldly interests*; and it consists in a firm resolution to do the Will of God, and a vehement desire to know it for that end. And this is a most necessary preparation to know the Truth, because nothing is more common than the perverting of mens judgments by the inordinacy of their lusts, and the serving of a corrupt interest.

The love of any Vice makes a man partial and insincere in examining the truth of that Doctrine by which he stands condemned. The belief of it is uneasy to him; it is not for his interest that it should be true. This is the reason why the fool saith in his heart, *There is no God.*

The worldly interests of men do strangely byass and fashion their Judgments. It were a thing never enough

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to beadmired, that so many men of Parts and Learning should not be ashamed of those pitiful grounds upon which they maintain the *Supremacy of the Pope*, the *Doctrine of Purgatory*, the *Half Communion*, the *Sacrifice of the Mass*, the *Invocation of Saints*, and the like ; but that those things do notoriously serve the Wealth and Grandeur of the Roman Church. If it be needful to go to a Conventicle for the getting of a rich Fortune, or the bettering of a mans Trade, a little enquiry will for the most part serve his turn, and satisfie him that the Separation is lawful, and the Causes of it are just. A man ought to set aside all consideration of his worldly interest, and to propound eternal life to himself as the end of his inquiry, when he labours to know the Truth.

The affectation of Popularity, and the love of Praise and Flattery, cannot consist with a sincere love of the Truth, and does very often hinder the attainment of it. It is hard to convince men of those things that check their vainglorious ends and purposes. And therefore says our Saviour, *How can ye believe in me, that receive honour one of another, and seek not that honour which cometh of God onely ?*

The wise man exhorts us to *buy the truth*, intimating thereby that we must quit all our sinful lusts and affections, and our carnal interests in prosecuting of it. In a word, we must be in mind prepared to believe all truth, by being resolved to do whatsoever appears to be the Will of God, let what will come of it in this World, having our hearts evermore fixed upon the great concernment of eternal life. And this is more necessary for the best knowledge, than vastness of Parts and Learning.

Where the mind is thus prepared, there will be little need to press the two remaining Dispositions ; whereof the former is,

2. *Competent diligence.* Errour is sometimes made to look so like the Truth, that a superficial examination will not serve to distinguish one from the other. Sometimes the Truth must be had by laying a great many things together, and the proof does not lie in one, but in many Arguments pointing the same way. Sometimes also a conclusion is offered with the shew of many *Motives of credibility*, which neither singly nor joyntly prove what is intended. And here patience and industry commonly helpeth more than quickness of judgement.

Our Saviour bad the Jews *search the Scriptures*; those very men who in all probability had read them, but as it seemeth, not with diligence enough. It were very well, if those that begin to study Divinity would not presume upon the diligence and honesty of others, whose Books they see full of Citations of Scripture; but take some pains to judge whether that be the true sence in which they are quoted. For want of this, several have miscarried in their first entrance upon this work; and the errors of men of name and authority, have been propagated. It would also be very happy for this Church, and for themselves too, if the dissenting people would not presently conclude that what they read in the Books of their own way is all agreeable to Gods Word, because they see abundance of Scripture in them, but would use some diligence to judge whether that be the true meaning in which the Scripture is there understood. It was doubtless with designe to catch such slothful people, that the *Catechism of H. T.* was published in our Language, wherein he pretends to prove all the lewd Doctrines of the Romish Religion, by Texts of Scripture. But if any man will take the pains to examine his proofs, he shall find such miserable wrestling

Abridgment of Christian Doctrine printed at Daway.

wrestling and perverting of the Scripture, that he will never trust a Book more merely for store of Scripture-Phrases and Citations; but go to the Fountain of Truth it self, the pure Word of God, to see whether the interpretations of men are indeed the unpolluted streams of that Spring, from whence they are said to come.

We must be willing to sift things to the bottom, if we would not be imposed upon. - A very little pains will serve to make a man confident; but 'tis not a little that will make him confident upon safe grounds.

3. To Diligence we must adde *Prayer* for the divine Illumination. In searching for Truth we must implore his help who is the God of Truth, whose Word is the Word of Truth, and whose Spirit is the Guide into Truth, that he would free our minds from all prejudices and corrupt affections, and from every thing which obstructs a right understanding. If we *lack wisdom*, we must ask it of God, who giveth his holy Spirit to them that ask him.

And now I dare appeal to all that read these Papers, if it had not been to the unspeakable advantage of Gods Church, and the Souls of men, if all that profess Christianity had inquired into the Controversies of Religion (so far as they are concerned in them) with these *Dispositions* that I have recommended. And therefore I do the more earnestly desire them to lay their hands upon their breasts, and in good earnest so ask themselves if they have in this manner sought the knowledge of the Truth; with a mind thus prepared, with impartiality and diligence, and constant Prayer for Gods blessing and direction.

§ 8.

IV. My next business is to offer some Considerations to perswade our people to an honest and impartial Tryal of Opinions in Religion. This

This indeed cannot be done by all with equal advantage, because of the difference of mens abilities; but something is to be done by all, and every one is to do what he can, and God expects no more.

If we chuse a way of Religion at random, or without honest care to know the Truth, we are in great danger of falling into delusion, because there are false Religions and damnable Errors in the World. Saith St. John, *Try the Spirits whether they be of God, because many false Prophets are gone out into the world.* There was danger of running into grievous error in the best and purest Age of the Church, if Christians were not careful to examine things. And surely the danger is greater in this corrupt Age, and this extremely divided State of *Christianity*.

It often happens also, I doubt for the most part, that Seducers are more diligent and wise to propagate Error, than good men are to gain Profelytes to the Truth. The former are evermore too hard for the latter in confidence, peremptoriness, threatening of damnation, magnificent and lofty pretences; and where the case calls for it, in artful addresses and insinuations. And this makes our danger the greater, if we are not resolved to try before we trust.

May, if we were secure from impostors, yet because no man is infallible, we should not surrender up our Belief wholly to the Authority of any man, but judge of his Doctrine as well as we can.

Because there cannot be a stronger ground for our assent to any thing, than that *God has said it*, we are to be very careful how we receive an Opinion, for which Texts of Scripture are multiplied one upon another, i. e. we must see whether they do indeed prove the thing in question: for otherwise we may by the pretence of so great

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Authority, be the more fastned in some dangerous error. We are exposed to manifest hazard, if we are apt to admire a man for bringing much Scripture to serve his purpose, but not to think it needful to see whether those passages of Holy Writ be pertinently applied or not.

To this I must adde, that the errors we may fall into for want of enquiry and examination, may for ought we know, be of dangerous consequence to our own Souls. Some there are that *wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction*; and if we are in their way, they may wrest them to, ours too. We may inconsiderately take up Principles that will by degrees debauch our Consciences, and reconcile us to wicked practices, and in many instances eat out the sense of good and evil, sin and duty.

On the other hand, by considering things as impartially and judiciously as we can, we shall not onely be secure from running into great errors, but the Doctrines of true Religion *will become more plain to us*, and we shall have a *more clear and distinct apprehension of them*; which will reward our endeavours with *great pleasure and satisfaction*. For next to the delight of a good Conscience gained by doing what we know to be our duty, there is no pleasure more pure and agreeable to the best part of our nature, than that which arises from an improved knowledge in the things of God.

And having well weighed and considered the grounds of our Perswasion, we shall *adhere more stedfastly to that truth which we have learn'd*, and not be easily unsetled by the *Sophistry* or the *Confidence* of ill men, being prepared to shew that there is no sound Reason in the former, and no just Cause for the latter. And when Seducers perceive that we have inquired too far into things, to be born:

born down with peremptoriness, or to be deluded with colours; they will be discouraged from attempting to draw us into their Net.

Moreover, *it will be no little satisfaction to us, when we are going out of the world, that we have all along taken due pains to inform our selves in things of the greatest concernment to us, viz. those which regard our everlasting salvation; and that the errors into which we may have fallen, were not to be imputed to want of honest diligence in inquiring after the Truth, but onely to humane infirmity.*

In the mean time, *we cannot have the conscience of sincerity upon good grounds, if we do not with diligence apply our selves to know all our duty, and consequently all that divine Truth which is the Rule of it, or which leads to the performance of it. One character of that good and honest heart which our Saviour compares to the good Ground, is to understand the Word. And the reason why the Pharisees did not understand, was because they were not of God, but of their Father the Devil whose lusts they did. One reason why God in his wisdom permits Impostures and Errors to go up and down in the World, is because this serves to make a more evident difference between those that are sincere and honest, and those that are not so. For in these circumstances good men will take the more pains to distinguish between Truth and Error, while the insincere either take up that Profession which serves best for their worldly ends, or take occasion by the differences that are in the World about Religion, to throw off all pretence to Religion it self. There must be heresies among you, saith St. Paul, that they which are approved may be made manifest.*

To which we may adde, that by honest endeavours

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to be rightly informed in matters of Religion, we do in some measure qualifie our selves for the happiness of another life, and shew that we are disposed heavenwards, and desirous of that infinitely better state of things, where Darknes and Errour shall be done away. For one great part of the Reward promised in a better life, is that we shall know divine things more perfectly there, than we can do in this World. But this can be no happiness to any but to those that are lovers of Truth and Goodness here.

I shall conclude this point with one consideration more, That at this time we have very considerable advantages and opportunities towards the discovery of Truth in the present Controversies amotig us. We of this Church are perswaded that *Papists* and other *Sectaries* do causelessly divide from our Communion, and grievously sin against God, and endanger their own Souls, as well as disturb the quiet of the Church, by their separation from it, and their combinations against it. And therefore some pains has been taken, more than ordinary, to shew them the error of their way, by going through the several points upon which they pretend to justify their doings. And it is plain, as I have shewn already, that in things of this nature they are mightily concerned to know the Truth. And therefore if they neglect so far an opportunity of examining things as is now offered them, they will have the more to answer for another day. The several Controversies between this Church on the one side, and the *Dissenters* and the *Rasants* on the other, are stated and argued in a plain and familiar way, and brought down for the most part to the capacity of ordinary Readers. And therefore let both the one and the other look to it, that they do not either in obstinacy or in laziness, or for worldly interest, put away the Truth

Truth from themselves. We should be very sorry if our endeavours should have no other effect than to make them more inexcusable at last. It will be our grief, but it will be their condemnation.

§ 9.

V. When after due examination, we have settled our selves upon true grounds, whether in keeping our first Persuasions, or in changing them (if we found they were wrong) for better: we must remember that there are duties incumbent upon us growing from the knowledge we have gained.

I. We are to be *thankful to God* for the Truth we have learn'd. When we see how miserably some men are mistaken and deluded in things that are both plain enough, and of great moment, we should not insult over them and grow into self-conceit, but into humility and gratitude to God, acknowledging it to be of his grace and goodness, that we are not led away into the same delusions. We are indeed to thank him for all things that contributed towards our escape or recovery. If we have a better natural apprehension and judgment than some others, who was it that made the difference? If we had a good Education, and were put into a right way at first, it was God that chose those happy circumstances for us. If we have recovered from any way of dangerous error in which we were bred up, the conversation, the friends, the books, and all other means by which we came to be better informed, were ministred unto us by the good providence of God. And that degree of a good mind which either prompted us to inquire, or prepared us to do it with success, was likewise from his Grace. Finally, it was his Blessing that crown'd all. For every good and perfect gift cometh from above,

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bove, from the Father of lights. So that in effect God is to have all the praise. And if we make it our business humbly and thankfully to acknowledge all his goodness in that knowledge of the Truth to which we have attained, we shall reap this great advantage and comfort thereby, that by his grace and providence he will communicate to us more and more knowledge, if it be needful for us; or at least that he will not suffer us to fall into any dangerous error. For we are not safe from damnable errors merely because we believe the Truth at present; our perseverance in it depends upon the Grace of God, which is forfeited by nothing sooner than by Pride and Ingratitude. For *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.* And if by the impiety of neglecting to acknowledge God in those Blessings we have received from him, we should provoke him to leave us to our selves; our Judgments though they be set right at present, will easily be depraved and corrupted by vicious affections, and by degrees we may fall from one delusion to another, till we come to believe the same things with those men whom we were once apt to scorn or to pity for their stupidity and blindness.

Now the ways are very plain by which we are to express our thankfulness to God for the knowledge we have gain'd.

We must do this in our daily Prayers, if we would shew our selves grateful in any proportion to the greatness of the benefit we have received. We are to thank God for the *least of his mercies*, because we are *less than the least*; and therefore for all the Blessings of this life, and of the outward man; that we are not blind or lame, that we have not distorted limbs, or a deformed shape. But is it not a more valuable Blessing still to have a
mind

mind clear from all foul and monstrous error, endued with soundness of Judgment, and replenisht with the knowledge of Divine Truth? Does not this therefore call for particular acknowledgments and thanks?

We must be sure to express our thankfulness by better obedience, and by improving in all Virtue and Piety, as we have improved in Knowledge. Otherwise we receive this Grace of God in vain. Knowledge conduceth to a mans true happiness by leading him to do well; but if he holds the Truth in unrighteousness, by *increasing knowledge* he does but *increase sorrow*, and that because he increaseth his guilt. But that which I chiefly intend here, is this: That God by enlightning our minds with a more full discovery of the Truth, has laid upon us a great obligation in general to love him more perfectly, and to perform his Will in all things more readily and cheerfully than we have done. And this is true thankfulness, if because God hath led us to the understanding of some things which we were ignorant of heretofore, we do more heartily perform those plain Duties, and obey those divine Rules of which we were not ignorant before.

Finally, it is a principal expression of our gratitude to God, for being enlightned and undeceived our selves; to be charitably helpful for the undeceiving of others, and leading them into the knowledge of that Truth into which God by his providence and grace hath led us. For God is never more pleased with us than when we do good one unto another: And therefore our charity to our mistaken Brethren, is the most acceptable Sacrifice of Praise that we can offer to him. But this is so considerable a thing, that it ought to go by it self for one remarkable use we are to make of having gained the knowledge of the Truth. Wherefore,

2. Let

2. Let us consider how we are, after this, to behave our selves to others. I have already told you, that in gratitude to God we are to do what we can, to recover those to whom we have opportunities to do this good office; and that because God would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. This was that which our Lord said to Peter, *When thou art converted, strengthen thy Brethren*; and if those who are not thoroughly confirmed in the Truth are to be farther instructed, there is the same reason for endeavouring to recover those that are quite out of the way. Therefore if any of our Friends and Acquaintance, or others, whom at any time we have a good opportunity of instructing, remain under those errors that we have forsaken, and have discerned good cause to forsake; we must remember that though it was chiefly by the grace and disposal of God that we came to a right understanding, yet it was also by humane means, by conversing with others, or by reading their Books. And therefore we should take our selves to be fit Instruments under God for the reducing of them, by desiring them earnestly either to hear what we have learned from others, or to read those Books by which we have been convinced. And we should be the more earnestly engaged in this charity, because those whom we may prevail withal, will thereby be engaged to help others also; and by this means our diligence and charity will be blessed with the good success of propagating the knowledge of Truth so far, that we shall not be able to see to the end of it. If therefore thou art convinced that thy former Perswasions were erroneous, and thy Practices grounded upon them unjustifiable, be not ashamed to confess thy mistake, but shew thy self glad that thou art now better informed; and go to thy Friend and tell him that

that thou art fully perswaded thy way has been wrong all this while, and shew him these Arguments that have set thee right, that he, as well as thy self, may rejoyce in the discovery of the Truth, and have the same reason to bless God that thou hast.

Now when we are thus resolved, let us by no means forget in what manner we are to apply our selves to our mistaken Brother for his information, *i. e.* in *meekness of wisdom*, in the *spirit of meekness*, without railing and bitterness, though we should meet with unhand-some opposition, remembring that we our selves not long since were under the same mistakes, and had the like fondness for those erroneous Opinions which we would now rescue our Brother from. If he does not take information and receive instruction as fast as we did, we must not presently grow into passion; for some mens prejudices are greater and stronger than others, and all men have not the same capacity of understanding, and quickness of apprehension; and therefore more time is to be allowed, and more patience is to be used for the recovery of one man, than may be needful in the case of another. And because nothing puts a slow or a prejudiced man more backward than rough and bitter discourse, therefore more meekness, and gentleness, and patience is requisite in dealing with him, than if we had to do with one of better wit or less prejudice. When we would bring a man to the Truth, we must avoid all things that will be sure to drive him at a farther distance from it, as clamour, fierceness, and railing will certainly do. For this carriage does but harden the obstinate, and confound the simple.

3. When we are convinced of the Truth, as we must not be ashamed, so neither must we be afraid to own it, but constantly adhere to it by professing it, and practi-

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sing according to it, whatever we lose or suffer for so doing. For otherwise we are convinced to no other purpose than the increasing of our guilt, for *he that knows his Masters will and doth it not; shall be beaten with many stripes.* If therefore thou hast hitherto been a *Papist*, but art now convinced of the impious Doctrines and Practices of the Church of *Rome*; or a *Dissenter*, but art now satisfied that there is no just ground for separation from the Church of *England*; be not afraid of the Reproaches and Accusations of those whose errors thou hast left, no, not though your dependance be in a great measure upon them, or your expectations of worldly advantage from them be never so great. Consider that thy salvation lies at stake, and that the question is, whether Gods love is not to be preferred before their favour, and that you are now to shew that you do not *love the praise of men more than the praise of God.* Tell them that you will be still glad of their friendship, but that you cannot purchase it at so dear a rate, as to sin against God for it, either by renouncing that which you are thoroughly convinced is Gods Truth, or by going contrary to a Conscience well informed of your duty. Let them know that you have been at a great deal of pains to discover the truth in these matters, and more than they have been at; that you value that knowledge of your duty to which the Grace and Providence of God hath led you, at a more just rate than to sacrifice it to every worldly interest; and that the industry you have used to inform your self aright, would turn to a very evil account, if after all, you should play the Hypocrite.

When we have the Truth, *our loins must be girt about with it*; we must love it heartily, profess it sincerely, and contend for it earnestly, and practise it honestly.

When

When we have *bought the Truth* by diligent and impartial enquiry, we *we must not sell it* for the gain of worldly Wealth or Honour, or any other secular advantage, no not for the safety of our lives. The sum of all, is this: *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*

F I N I S.

the world is a vast and unexplored field of knowledge, and it is our duty to explore it. We must not let it pass by us without making the most of it. We must not let it pass by us without making the most of it.

THE END

A Catalogue of several Tracts written by some
Divines in and about the City of London,
for the satisfaction of the *Protestant Dissen-*
ters.

1. **A** Perswasive to Communion with the Church of
England.
2. A Resolution of some Cases of Conscience which
respect Church-Communion.
3. A Letter to *Anonymus*, in answer to his three Let-
ters to Dr. *Sherlock* about Church-Communion.
4. The Case of Lay-Communion.
5. The Case of mixt Communion: Whether it be
Lawful to Separate from a Church upon the account of
promiscuous Congregations and mixt Communions?
6. The Case of Indifferent things used in the Wor-
ship of God, proposed and Stated.
7. A Vindication of it.
8. A Discourse of Conscience.
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